UNITED NATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SECTION

DPI/NGO/SB/91/9A

DPI/NGO ORIENTATION COURSE
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(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination.)

Sylvan Barnet Jr., Chairperson of the Department of Public Information/Non-governmental Organization Executive Committee and Representative of the International Advertising Association, opened the orientation course by describing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as "We The Peoples". He paraphrased former President Kennedy, "Ask not what the United Nations can do for you; ask what you can do for the United Nations". To be an effective NGO, he suggested people keep the following five words in mind: perspective, preparation, practice, patience, and persistence in putting your points across.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Farouk Mawlawi, Chief of the NGO and Institutional Relations Section, the Department of Public Information, described the important role NGOs play in the work of the United Nations. He mentioned that two hundred NGOs were present in San Francisco at the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945.

Article 71 of the United Nations Charter provides for consultative status with the Economic & Social Souncil (ECOSOC). General Assembly Resolution 13 (1946) established the Department of Public Information with a mandate to extend every possible cooperation to NGOs interested in the United Nations.

The number of non-governmental organizations associated with DPI has increased from 271 in 1971 to nearly 1,200 today. About 40 per cent of these NGOs are in consultative status with ECOSOC.

A list of the non-governmental organizations affiliated with DPI is distributed globally to help establish a network among the NGOs. In addition, NGO representatives are furnished with photo identifications which allow them access to the United Nations. Briefings are held weekly on Thursday mornings, videos are shown on Thursday afternoons and there is an Annual Conference held in September, prior to the convening of the General Assembly.

Farida Ayoub, Chief of the NGO unit with the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs (DIESA), outlined the privileges of the NGOs in consultative status and the application process.

NGOs associated with ECOSOC may sit as observers in meetings of the Council as well as in subsidiary meetings. They may make oral statements and participate in international conferences convened by ECOSOC and other United Nations' international bodies. DIESA issues a calendar which includes ECOSOC and NGO committee meetings.

To apply for consultative status, an NGO should write to Farida Ayoub's office. An intergovernmental committee reviews the applications.

There are NGO committees on aging, youth, human rights, disarmament, South Africa, narcotics and substance abuse, shelter and community, family, United Nations Decade for Women, population, sustainable development, crime prevention and criminal justice. These committees meet once a month. The NGOs in consultative status meet annually with the governments of the member states serving on the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Fred Eckhard, Spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly and Associate Spokesperson for the Secretary General, addressed some of the political issues faced by the United Nations.

Mr. Eckhard suggested that the Gulf War had potentially redefined the role of the United Nations. For the first time, Article 42, which authorizes the use of military force to roll-back weapons, had been invoked showing that the United Nations Charter has teeth.

Mr. Eckhard said there is a high degree of political involvement by all member states and particularly by the five members of the Security Council. The Soviet Union and the United States have a new relationship which makes it possible for them to work together. Super power cooperation is opening up new possibilities and leading to an invigorated United Nations and a Security Council with muscle and effect.

In a recent interview the Secretary-General outlined a few of the issues he would like to help resolve in the 10 months remaining of his term. These include the conflicts in Cyprus, Cambodia and the Western Sahara. Mr. Eckhard commented on how the Secretary-General had been able to stake out cautiously a political position of his own and to take initiatives in pursuit of conflict resolution under his good offices mandate from the Charter and not necessarily from marching orders of the Security Council. How the role of the Secretary-General evolves will depend a great deal on the new Secretary-General, he said.

Susan Markham, Chief of the Economic & Social Development and Human Rights Programme Section with DPI, used the United Nations Social Agenda, a pamphlet published by DPI, to show how the UN Observance Days can highlight issues by raising awareness and encouraging people to take action. Ms. Markham mentioned some of the upcoming United Nations Observance Days:

World Environment Day is on 5 June. In 1992 there will be a conference on environment and development in Brazil. Combining the two issues is unusual and yet essential as they are so entwined. It is estimated that the developed countries are producing most of the pollution. The developing world is wondering how it can develop without heavy environmental costs. Much of the environmental degradation is caused by poverty, Ms. Markham said.

The **Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking** is on 26 June. International Literacy Day is on 8 September. One-fifth of the world is illiterate. Of those who are illiterate, 95 per cent live in developing countries and two-thirds are women.

1992 celebrates the **10th Anniversary of the World Assembly on Aging.** By the end of the century 14 per cent of the world's population will be sixty years or older. **Universal Children's Day** is celebrated on 7 October and will be having a 10th anniversary, in 1995. 40,000 children die each day from preventable diseases. A lack of clean water and sanitation in many countries is the main cause of these illnesses. In Cambodia there is no clean water at all. Children in refugee camps live in better conditions than those in the country itself.

The **International Year of the Family** will be in **1994**. The agenda is still being discussed. One issue is sure to include the role of the man in the family. In broken families women are often blamed for not holding the family together.

HOW TO UTILIZE THE NGO RESOURCE CENTRE

Frank Merritt, Associate Information Officer, said that the NGO Resource Centre is there to help NGOs obtain information from the United Nations. Staff assist NGOs in finding information about meetings, whether they are open to the public, and what decisions are made by various committees. He mentioned two useful reference books for NGOs, the Permanent Missions book and the United Nations Telephone Directory, which are issued twice a year in March and September.

Eric Wong, who is responsible for cataloguing the materials in the Resource Centre, described the Centre as resembling a greeting card shop. The Centre has various categories of documents according to subject (e.g.: apartheid, crime, decolonization), specialized agencies (such as UNICEF and UNESCO), regions of the world, and information in different languages.

In addition, the Centre has all the documents of the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. Also available is all the material published by the Department of Public Information. This includes such useful books as Basic Facts About The United Nations, Notes For Speakers, and posters showing the organs of the United Nations. DPI issues the Daily Journal which lists the programme of the day as well as whether the meetings are open to the public. Everyday a release is issued which lists the previous day's documents, usually about forty. The Daily Highlights summarize the day's press releases. All of these documents may be ordered in bulk free of charge by submitting a letter several weeks in advance. The letter should describe the nature of the conference for which the material will be used and how many people are expected to attend.

Arlette Leoncavallo addressed the mechanics of accreditation of NGO representatives. Every year a form letter is sent to NGOs associated with the Department of Public Information requesting the organization to designate representatives. Upon the approval of the Chief of the NGO Section, a photo identification pass will be issued to the representative when he/she goes to the Secretariat. The representative must bring a copy of the letter of accreditation to the United Nations. A monthly schedule of the weekly briefings as well as summaries of the briefings and some documents are posted to all the NGOs.

SERVICES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

Vadim Perfiliev, Director of the Dissemination Division, DPI, introduced the session.

Carolyn Schuler-Uluc, Officer-in-Charge of the Public Services Section, is responsible for welcoming visitors to the United Nations as well as making the United Nations more visible in New York City. The Public Services Section offers tours in twenty languages, answers questions from visitors, and places advertisements for the United Nations in airports and at bus-stops. The Group Programme Unit arranges briefings for NGOs which may include tours.

Thomas Prendergast, Chief of the Photo Unit, Information Products Division, is in charge of providing United Nations photos to high school yearbooks, NGOs and to everyone else who requests them. The photo unit adds 5000 pictures a year to the library which are filed under subject headings. NGOs may obtain photographs at no charge.

Frank Barabas, Senior Information Officer, briefly described the computerized Information Services on the United Nations. This programme allows users to receive all the press releases and resolutions passed at the United Nations. When funding for the service ran dry a few years ago, one of the NGOs, Global Education Motivators, took it over.

Pat Szczerba of Global Education Motivators outlined how people can have access to the United Nations computer data bases and how to operate computer searches. The following equipment is needed to use UNISER; a computer, a modem, a communications software programme, a telephone line for the computer, and UNISER membership. Electronic mail has two great advantages over other forms of communication. It is quick and inexpensive. Holding conferences by computer saves much time and money, she said. The resource center has a leaflet describing UNISER and how to log on.

HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE NGO -- Panel discussion

Deborah Wolfe, representative of the National Alliance of Black School Educators, suggested that all NGOs should be knowledgeable, articulate and enthusiastic. She stressed what a great opportunity it is for NGOs to have access to delegates. She also suggested that new NGO representatives become acquainted with the staff of the United Nations agency of particular interest to their NGO.

Margery Cohen, representative of the League of Women Voters of the United States, discussed how the role of the NGO representative is to keep members informed. The responsibility of the members is to keep their communities updated. One way of doing this is by celebrating one or several United Nations Observance Days.

Yael Danieli, representative of the World Federation For Mental Health, said that in talking to the public or members, it is important to speak about issues rather than the United Nations on its own. She described how her organization had vigorously lobbied delegates in the hallways of the Secretariat as well as in the United Nations building in Geneva. As a result of several years of persistence her NGO was successful in working with other organizations to have the Declaration of Basic Principles of Victims of Crime and Abusive Power passed. This was the product of an NGO initiative which has changed the lives of millions of people as well as the legislation of at least one-hundred countries.

David Brook, represenative of the International Studies Association, emphasized the strength of NGOs when they work together to take action on an issue. He said working closely with one or two NGO committees helps to create a vital sense of community which in turn helps to bring about peace.